
Wisconsin Karner Blue Butterfly Habitat Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

Abstract

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is applying to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for a statewide incidental take permit covering the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly (*Lycaeides melissa samuelis*). The DNR is pursuing this action in collaboration with 26 other private and public partners whose land management interests are potentially affected by the listing of the butterfly under the federal Endangered Species Act. In the absence of an incidental take permit, these landowners would potentially be in violation of the Endangered Species Act and subject to restrictions on the use of their lands. This document, consisting of the *Wisconsin Statewide Karner Blue Butterfly Habitat Conservation Plan* (HCP) and the associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), is an integral part of the incidental take permit application. The HCP describes broad-scale land conservation and outreach/education strategies. Efforts are focused on conservation across the Karner blue butterfly's Wisconsin range, with the greatest emphasis on the butterfly's highest potential habitat area. Implementation relies heavily on adaptive management principles. The EIS was prepared to fulfill the requirements of both the Wisconsin and National environmental Policy Acts. The DNR will administer the permit in cooperation with all the partners and other cooperators. Individual partner roles and commitments for both management and outreach are described in the HCP, in the DNR's Implementation Agreement with the USFWS and in individual partner's legally binding conservation agreements ("Species and Habitat Conservation Agreements") with the DNR.

Wisconsin supports the largest and most widespread Karner blue butterfly populations in the world including 270 occurrences in 23 counties. The species has been extirpated from much of its historic range; thus, the status of the species in Wisconsin is critical to its continued survival. The Karner blue butterfly is a disturbance-dependent species adapted to barrens and other early successional habitats. An important aspect of the HCP is to provide for land management regimes that assure a balance between habitat gain from disturbance and habitat loss from natural succession. The two broad approaches proposed in the HCP are: 1) Management with consideration for Karner blue butterflies, and 2) Management to feature and enhance Karner blue butterflies. Partners have committed to management with consideration on 227,492 acres and to management to feature on 37,725 acres. Overall, the partners are including 2.03 million acres, which they own and manage in the HCP for permit coverage. The HCP, with its biological approach, focuses on geographic areas and activities, which provide the highest potential to protect and enhance Karner blue butterfly habitat. The strategy goes beyond the initial partners and seeks to include all landowners with potential habitat. This inclusion strategy consists of a category of non-voluntary participants who must formally apply for and receive a Certificate of

Inclusion from the USFWS, an opportunity for voluntary participants that receive incidental take permit coverage without further process, an extensive

public outreach and education plan to reach all appropriate landowners and land users and a review of the participation strategy after three years of implementation to determine its effectiveness.

The physical, biological and socio-economic impacts associated with implementing the HCP have been assessed and described in the EIS. In developing the HCP, the partners considered a number of alternatives to the statewide plan including the no action alternative, and HCP with mitigation banking and a reduced scope HCP alternative. The impacts of these alternatives are compared and contrasted to the impacts of the proposed plan.